

March 14, 2003

1420 East 6th Ave.
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Environmental Quality Council
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Fisheries Division
Endangered Species Coordinator
Bozeman Office
Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Broadwater Conservation District, 415 South Front Street, Townsend, MT 59644
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Pat Barnes Missouri River Chapter Trout Unlimited, 805 Mill Road, Helena, MT 59601
Curt and Zelda Diehl, 454 Flynn Lane, Townsend, MT 59644

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment prepared for the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The Program tentatively plans to provide funding for a project calling for the removal of two irrigation structures on Dry Creek, at tributary to the Missouri River. This proposed project is located on property owned by Curt and Zelda Diehl approximately 6 miles south of the town of Townsend in Broadwater County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., April 14, 2003 to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Helena at the address listed above. Completion of this project is contingent upon approval being granted by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (406) 444-2432. Please note that this draft EA will be considered as final if no substantive comments are received by the deadline listed above.

Sincerely,

Mark Lere, Program Officer
Habitat Protection Bureau
Fisheries Division
E-mail: mlere@state.mt.us

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Dry Creek Fish Barrier Removal Project

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-272 through 273 which directs the Department to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The program involves physical projects to restore degraded fish habitat in rivers and lakes for the purpose of improving wild fisheries. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to help accomplish this goal. The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is proposing to provide funding for a project calling for the removal of two irrigation diversions from Dry Creek to allow rainbow trout access to an additional 0.3 miles of stream for spawning and rearing habitat. In exchange for the abandonment of these two diversions, a pipeline will be installed to pump water from the Broadwater-Missouri Canal to meet water needs. This irrigation system will be more efficient and will result in enhanced stream flow in Dry Creek. The project site is located on property owned by Curt Diehl approximately 6 miles south of the town of Townsend in Broadwater County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on Dry Creek located approximately 6 miles south of the town of Townsend within Township 6 North, Range 2 East, Section 27 in Broadwater County.

II. Need for the Project: One goal within Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks six year operations plan for the fisheries program is to “restore and enhance degraded habitats” by implementing habitat restoration projects and administering the Future Fisheries Improvement Program to restore important habitats on public and private lands. This proposed project would help meet this goal.

Dry Creek is one of only a few tributaries between Canyon Ferry Dam and Toston Dam that provide recruitment to the Missouri River and Canyon Ferry Reservoir. Currently, large numbers of rainbow trout resident to the river and reservoir use the lower 0.5 miles of Dry Creek, downstream of two irrigation diversions, for spawning and rearing. Removal of to these two diversions would open and additional 0.3 miles of spawning and rearing habitat in Dry Creek and would indirectly provide some added flow to the stream.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to remove two irrigation structures on lower Dry Creek and replace them with a pipeline that takes water directly out of the Broadwater-Missouri Canal. The irrigation structures will be removed and the new pipe and pump will be installed using a backhoe and hand labor. Once the irrigation structures are removed, rock grade controls will be installed to prevent head cutting or other channel changes in Dry Creek. The new pipeline will require a “change” authorization from the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. Currently, canal water simply is conveyed down Dry Creek to meet the needs of the water users. This proposal calls for installing a pipeline to convey canal water to the water users instead of using the Dry Creek channel. This project is expected to cost \$16,459.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$12,000.00.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

The removal of two fish migration barriers will open an additional 0.3 miles of spawning and rearing habitat for rainbow trout residing in the Missouri River and Canyon Ferry Reservoir. This additional habitat is expected to enhance the recruitment of rainbow trout to the Missouri River and Canyon Ferry Reservoir.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Short-term increases in turbidity will occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, construction will occur during a low flow period and operation of equipment in the stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable. The Department of Environmental Quality will be contacted to determine narrative conditions required to meet short-term water quality standards and protect aquatic biota. A 310 permit (Montana Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act) will be obtained from the local conservation district. Implementation of this project will require a “change” authorization from Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. The proposed pipeline will more efficiently convey water resulting in water savings and enhanced stream flow in Dry Creek

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils along the stream margin would be disturbed during the removal of the irrigation structures and pipeline installation, but would be stabilize following re-vegetation efforts.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Disturbance to riparian vegetation during removal of the irrigation structures would be minor. Vegetation and cover would be disturbed as a result of installing the pipeline. However, re-vegetation efforts would act to mitigate these disturbances.

5. Aesthetics.

Aesthetics would be adversely impacted due to on-site construction activities and the presence of heavy equipment. However, the construction period is estimated to be less than one week in duration. In the long term, aesthetics would be enhanced by removing two man-made structures from the stream channel.

9. Historic and archaeological sites

The proposed project may require an individual Army Corp of Engineers 404 permit. Therefore, the State Historic Preservation Office has been contacted to determine the need for compliance with the federal historic preservation regulations. The project will not begin until a cultural clearance is granted.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

4. Agricultural or industrial production

Changing the point of diversion from Dry Creek to the Broadwater-Missouri Canal will not adversely affect agricultural production. Currently, the Dry Creek channel is used to convey canal water down to the water users. This project would install a pipeline to convey water to the water users.

7. Access to & quality of recreational activities.

The intent of the project is to enhance the recruitment of rainbow trout to the Missouri River and Canyon Ferry Reservoir. As a result, the recreational fisheries in the river and reservoir are expected to slightly improve.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, spawning and rearing habitat will remain limited to the lower 0.5 miles of Dry Creek. As a result, the potential for recruitment of rainbow trout from Dry Creek will not be fully realized.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to remove two man-made fish barriers that will open an additional 0.3 miles of spawning and rearing habitat in Dry Creek. The project also will increase instream flow in Dry Creek as a result of installing a pipeline that will more efficiently convey irrigation water. This proposal is expected to enhance the recruitment of rainbow trout to the Missouri River and Canyon Ferry Reservoir and enhance the recreational fisheries that these water bodies provide.

VIII. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section

1. Is an EIS required? No.

We conclude from this review that the proposed activities will have a positive impact on the physical and human environment.

2. Level of public involvement.

The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The proposed project also will be reviewed by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission and will be contingent upon their approval. The Environmental Assessment (EA) is being distributed to all individuals and groups listed on

the cover letter. The EA will be published on Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks webpage:
fwp.state.mt.us

3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5:00 PM on April 14, 2003.

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

Mark Lere, Program Officer
Habitat Protection Bureau
Fisheries Division
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
1420 East 6th Avenue
Helena, MT 59620

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MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS
1420 E 6th Ave, PO BOX 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701
(406) 444-2535

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Title Dry Creek Fish Barrier Removal Project

Division/Bureau Fisheries Division -Future Fisheries Improvement
Description of Project The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is proposing to provide funding for a project calling for the removal of two irrigation structures on Dry Creek, a tributary to the Missouri River. Presently, these structures are passage barriers to migrating rainbow trout. This project would provide rainbow trout access to an additional 0.3 miles of spawning and rearing habitat. The project site is located on property owned by Curt Diehl approximately 6 miles south of the town of Townsend in Broadwater County.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Terrestrial & aquatic life and habitats			X			X
2. Water quality, quantity & distribution			X			X
3. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture			X			X
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality			X			X
5. Aesthetics			X			X
6. Air quality				X		
7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources				X		
8. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		X

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Social structures & mores				X		
2. Cultural uniqueness & diversity				X		
3. Local & state tax base & tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural or industrial production				X		X
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		
7. Access to & quality of recreational and wilderness activities			X			X
8. Quantity & distribution of employment				X		
9. Distribution & density of population & housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial & commercial activity				X		
12. Demands for energy				X		
13. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals				X		
14. Transportation networks & traffic flows				X		

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction Broadwater Conservation District, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corp of Engineers, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, State Historic Preservation Office
 Individuals or groups contributing to this EA Ron Spoon, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.
EA prepared by: Mark Lere
Date: February 27, 2003